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ABSTRACT

Do we control tests, or do these instruments of measurement control us? Standard scores, percentiles, norms, standard deviations and other elements of measurement can assist the educative process or degenerate into mechanical crutches. There is general consensus among most educators that learning is a multifactor experience involving, among other elements, the factor of environmental influences. Various studies have illustrated the effect of environment upon the academic achievement of youth and adults from racial minorities, especially those who reside in poverty communities. Educators who depend upon so-called measures of academic aptitude perform a disservice to students from racial minorities. Not only do these students become educationally crippled by this kind of single-factor decision making, but society also loses the talents of individuals whose potentials are too complex to accurately determine by scores obtained on tests of academic aptitude and achievement. Students from racial minorities could benefit more from diagnostic examinations which will assist them in analyzing and eliminating their learning difficulties. Instruments of this nature could become significant factors in the educational and career progress of people who have been economically and culturally deprived. (Author/CK)

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TESTING AND EVALUATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION

AND

ITS EFFECT ON RACIAL MINORITIES

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A couple of years ago, while attending a convention, I heard a brilliant speech by Dr. Sam Shepherd. I realize the name Dr. Sam Shepherd means different things to different people. To those who are attuned only to "sensational" news events, Dr. Shepherd is the Osteopath who was sentenced and later reprieved for the murder of his wife. The name Dr. Sam Shepherd has added meaning to those who are in touch with educational leaders. To them, he is the outstanding Superintendent of Schools in the Banneker District of St. Louis, Missouri.

Dr. Shepherd tells of an incident in his school system which illustrates how testing is not to be used. It seems as though a teacher had met her class for the first time, and she immediately began recording her pupils' I.Q.'s in her grade book. She was quite disturbed by the broad range of I.Q. scores. The range was between 75 and 155. Just imagine the reaction to this grade span of a person devoted to homogeneous grouping. This teacher took the attitude that some of her students, those with I.Q.'s of 115 plus, had excellent potential for learning; while some, those with I.Q.'s of 90 and below, would never achieve in her academic arena.

One day, while she was teaching a social studies unit, one of her pupils raised his hand to ask a question. The teacher glanced at her grade book to locate his I.Q. score prior to answering his question. She was horrified when she saw a score of 83 next to his name. Immediately an opinion was formed as to the capacity of this student to grasp the learning material of that class. Instead of answering Johnny's question, the teacher told him to take the plants to the basement and water them.

Later, a girl in that same class asked a question which evoked an entirely different response. The teacher was pleased to find a score of 135 next to Susan's name; thus, she offered her generous encouragement. This teacher was surprised to learn that the scores she had recorded as I.Q.'s were in reality student locker numbers.

Too often educators rely upon standard scores, percentiles, and standard deviations to do their job for them. Assumptions are too frequently made that academic potential, like corn flakes, is packaged at the factory and subject to little or no alterations. We have all had occasions to witness excellent academic achievement among individuals who scored low on standardized examinations. Dr. William Moore, President of Seattle Community College, recalls the lack of encouragement he received to continue in higher education. He said this negative advice was based upon his scores on tests of academic aptitude. If it were not for personal motivation and the encouragement of one teacher, the field of higher education would have been cheated out of Dr. Moore's exceptional mental talents.

When I was a counselor at East Technical High School in Cleveland, Ohio, I observed youngsters who achieved much higher than their predicted levels. One such individual was a young man who never scored higher than 85 on the Stanford-Binet. However, he achieved at the "B+" level in a curriculum including advanced algebra, physics, foreign language, and college English. This student, who according to scores of prediction should have been content to work on an assembly line, is now a professional Engineer. It makes one shudder to imagine how easily this young man's career goals could have been destroyed if his mother had not insisted that he enroll in the college preparatory curriculum. Some professional educators were going to mechanically assign him to a curriculum which did not interest or challenge him.

Some psychometrists and educators will probably argue that exceptions do exist, and that it is unwise to make decisions on the basis of exceptions. I then would argue that the rule has very limited singular application. Darley and Anderson, writing on the functions of measurement in counseling, lists seven items of data which are vital to educational counseling:

1. General scholastic ability
2. Differential measures of achievement
3. Evidence of special aptitudes or disabilities
4. Interest
5. Personality structure and dynamics, including attitudes and beliefs
6. Socio-economic and cultural derivation and relations
7. Health and physical attributes

It is readily evident that the items just mentioned have varying degrees of influence upon success and adjustment. Obviously there are inter-correlations between items; however, quasi-educators rely entirely upon measures of general scholastic ability in placement, guidance, and counseling of students.

Among minority students, socio-economic and cultural derivation and relations take on added significance. When I refer to minority students, I am speaking of students belonging to racial and ethnic groups which are not only numerically small in relation to the larger population, but also minority in terms of their sharing in the goods, services, and opportunities of America. These groups include primarily students who are Black, Indian, Mexican-American, Oriental, and Spanish-speaking surnamed.

It is common knowledge throughout the American scene that education in the inner-cores of our large urban centers has been of sub-standard quality. Conant offered evidence to this effect in his perceptive report Slums and Suburbs. He

showed a distinct relationship between environmental problems and learning difficulties. A myriad of reports have preceded and followed Conant in illustrating how poverty, discrimination, transiency, and teacher and parent defeatism have all conspired to give the minority youth inferior education.

Even though many educational functionaries are aware of the symbiotic relationship between nature and nurture, there is a too frequent tendency among some to concentrate only on nature.

Colleges and universities have been traditionally guilty of single-factor decision making in the selection of new freshmen. College catalogues are resplendent with pronouncements that admission to their respective halls of ivy is decided upon multiple criteria, including high-school performance, test scores, personal recommendations, etc. However, it is a common practice among many institutions of higher education to establish cut-off scores and to adhere to them religiously. During the Summer of 1967, I participated in an admissions workshop at John Carroll University. Speaking of minorities, I was a minority within a minority at that workshop. Not only was I the only black participant, but I also was the only representative of a community college. Open admissions was a phenomena to which many of the colleges and universities represented at the workshop would not even give luke-warm consideration. Conversely, open admissions was at that time, and still remains, an integral part of my College's philosophy and practice. A major discussion topic of the workshop was: "The role of test scores in the admission process." The overwhelming majority of conferees said that scores on the ACT and/or SAT were the primary factors used in determining the admissibility of students to their institutions of higher learning.

A Catholic Sister from a well-known parochial college threw a snake into the aptitude testing game by means of a clever activity during one of the

sessions. She announced one afternoon that everyone was to meet in the gym the next morning instead of the auditorium. When we gathered in the gym, we discovered that arrangements had been made for our taking the Preliminary Scholastic Aptitude Examination. You never heard such weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth. One consolation was that we didn't have to identify ourselves. We were only required to record a number on the answer sheet so that we could identify our scores on an individual basis.

The scores were heavily clustered around the verbal and math scores of 400. It was readily apparent that a substantial number of the admissions officers at the workshop could not gain admittance to the colleges and universities they represented, if they were applying at that time.

The Sister's experiment cast suspicion upon the value of so-called measures of academic aptitude as predictors of scholastic success. All of the conferees had achieved a Master's degree and some had even earned Doctorate degrees. Some proponents of aptitude testing might challenge me by arguing that even though exams such as the ACT and SAT are far from perfect, they are the best we have.

Why continue to utilize aptitude testing as if it measures <u>absolute potential</u>? Why not develop, promote, and utilize examinations and cognitive evaluations which assist educators in diagnosing learning problems, and subsequently developing methods and mechanism for students to overcome these problems.

Minority students are adversely affected by current testing practices which emphasize academic aptitude testing. Because of cultural biases, it is difficult, if not impossible, to develop meaningful comparison between these students and the population on which these tests are normed. Since scholastic achievement is a major factor in the performance of students on so-called tests of academic aptitude, those students whose achievement level is below par will generally

score low. James Conant, Charles Silberman and other perceptive education writers have offered convincing evidence to the effect that schools serving minorities have done an exceptionally poor job. To borrow a phrase often used by Dr. Martin L. King, "The schools serving black, brown, and red youth have given them a bad check which has repeatedly come back marked 'no funds.'"

If colleges and universities are to adequately serve minority applicants, significant changes will have to be made in their testing policies. I favor the use of diagnostic tests which will help students to assess their strengths and weaknesses and subsequently assist students in establishing, adjusting and achieving their goals. I do not approve of testing programs which utilize aptitude tests as selection devices. It is obvious that black, brown, red and yellow students could benefit from the testing position presented here. It should also be obvious that all students could benefit from this humanistic approach to testing.

To test or not to test is not the most important question which should be considered by those involved in testing. More important questions should be: Which tests? and what for?

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Title of Program at which presentation will be made: The Role of Testing in the Educational Process among Racial Minorities - AMEG Conference

Do we control tests, or do these instruments of measurement control us? To pose this question to educators and psychometrists is to present a challenge of substantial magnitude. Standard scores, percentiles, norms, standard deviations and other elements of measurement can assist the educative process or degenerate into mechanical crutches.

There is general consensus among most educators that learning is a multifactor experience involving, among other elements, the factor of environmental influences. Various studies have illustrated the effect of environment upon the academic achievement of youth and adults from racial minorities, especially those who reside in poverty communities.

Educational administrators, teachers, counselors and admissions officers who depend upon so-called measures of academic aptitude perform a disservice to students from racial minorities. Not only do these students become educationally crippled by this kind of single-factor decision making, but society also loses th talents of individuals whose potentials are too complex to accurately determine by scores obtained on tests of academic aptitude and achievement.

Students from racial minorities could benefit more from diagnostic examinations which will assist them in analyzing and eliminating their learning difficulties. Instruments of this nature could become significant factors in the educational and career progress of people who traditionally have been on the short end of the goods and services stick in the United States.

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